



The President's Daily Brief

April 18, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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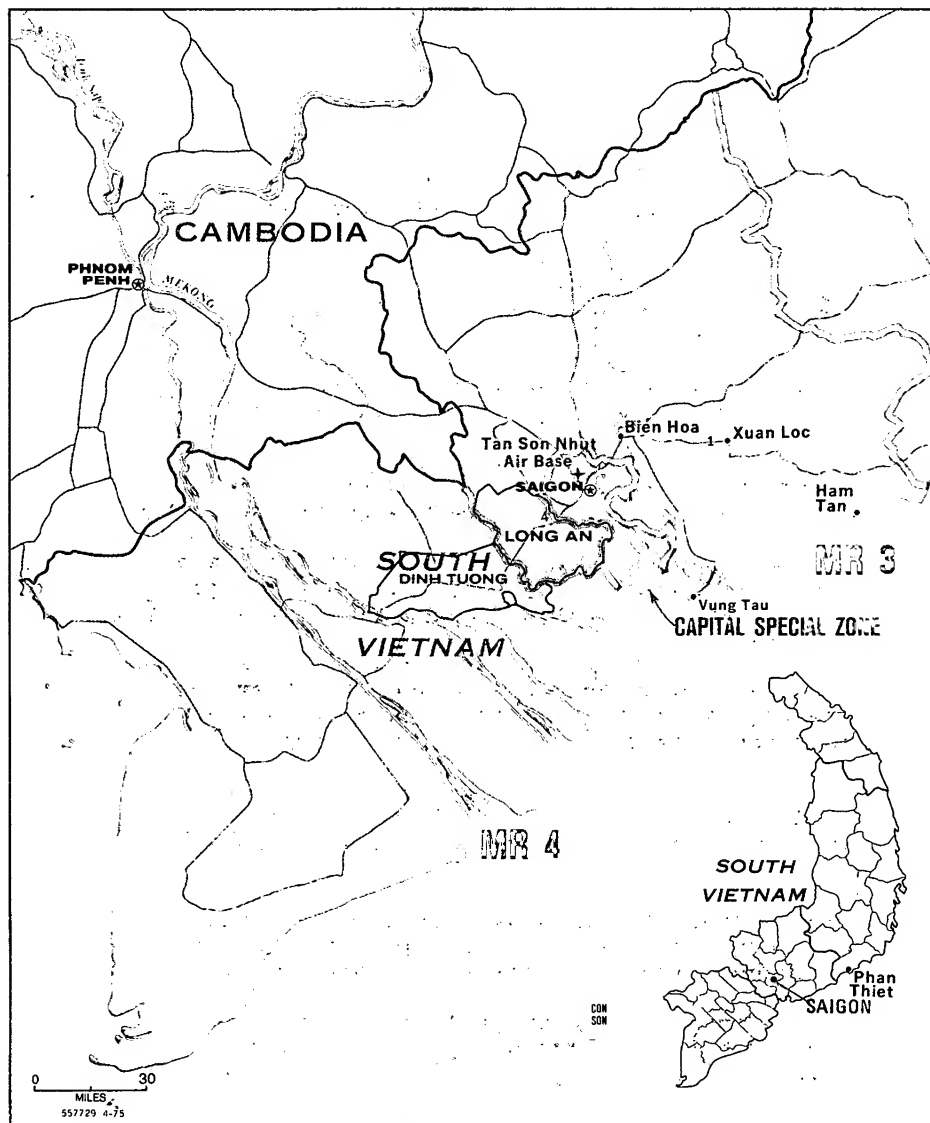
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SOUTH VIETNAM

The government's position on the Xuan Loc battlefield is deteriorating rapidly and the threat is quickly shifting to Bien Hoa.

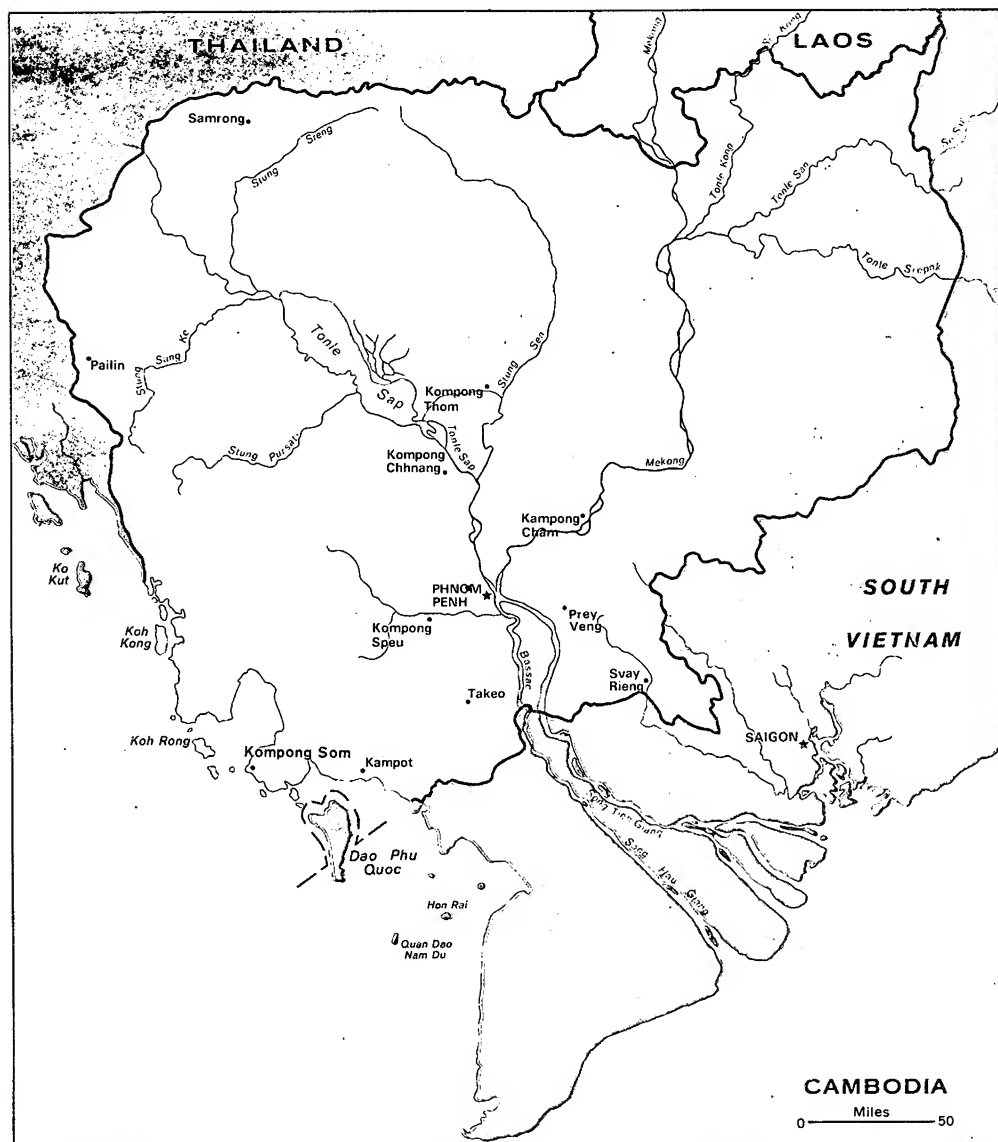
Two communist sapper regiments reportedly are approaching Bien Hoa from the north and northeast, and South Vietnamese commanders believe there are at least six other communist regiments now close enough to attack the city and nearby airbase in a matter of hours. Most of the combat support aircraft at Bien Hoa have already been transferred to Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airbase, but Bien Hoa remains an important facility for aircraft maintenance and munitions supply.

With a large share of Saigon's forces being chewed up at Xuan Loc, the government appears to have insufficient fighting units remaining to stop the communist thrust toward Saigon from the east.

Although South Vietnamese units in the delta provinces have been fighting well and have successfully repulsed communist efforts to sever Route 4, a key highway to Saigon, the developing situation looks grim. The communists have massed a substantial force--more than three divisions--in Dinh Tuong and Long An provinces just southwest of Saigon. With such a large force in position, the communists soon may try to overpower the two government divisions defending the road, isolate other South Vietnamese units south of Dinh Tuong, and begin a major drive against the capital.

Press reports say that communist sappers attacked the government's communications center at Phu Lam in Saigon's southwestern suburbs last night, but were driven off by South Vietnamese ground forces and helicopter gunships.

The South Vietnamese have decided to evacuate their last enclave in Military Region 2, Phan Thiet, which came under heavy communist tank and infantry attack early today. The abandonment of Phan Thiet will open coastal Route 1 for communist forces to move south into the provinces east of Saigon. The North Vietnamese began heavy tank and infantry attacks against Phan Thiet early today. A communist onslaught in this area would encounter little resistance from government troops still regrouping along the coast at Ham Tan. The communists then could move quickly on to Vung Tau--the last remaining important port on the eastern coast.



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CAMBODIA

A number of leading Cambodian military and some civilian leaders, including former Supreme Council president General Sak Sutsakhan, made eleventh-hour escapes from Phnom Penh. Former prime minister Long Boret, Republican Party strongman Sirik Matak, and former president Lon Nol's younger brother, Lon Non, are among those who remain in the capital, presumably in communist hands.

Long Boret and his family were left behind by helicopters making a dramatic last-minute departure from Phnom Penh's stadium. Lon Non played a part in arranging the surrender and was reportedly taken into custody by the communists. Sirik Matak apparently made no effort to escape.

The communist take-over appeared to be proceeding in an orderly fashion, although press reports early this morning claim that large numbers of Cambodians were attempting to leave Phnom Penh. The French ambassador in Bangkok reported that more than a thousand Cambodians have sought refuge in the French embassy in Phnom Penh. An exodus of large numbers from the capital could be part of an earlier reported communist plan to move people into the countryside to ease the strain on supplies in Phnom Penh.

An insurgent radio message intercepted yesterday directed that all foreigners, including Americans, were to be kept together. UN officials in Phnom Penh report that the communists are keeping the hotel where most Westerners were staying as a neutral zone.

Some newsmen are still managing to file stories from the capital, but the communists will probably clamp down on external communications as they consolidate their control.

So far, there has been no formal announcement of a new regime in Phnom Penh. An earlier intercepted message had indicated that the insurgent leadership would not enter the capital until the

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occupation was complete. Prince Sihanouk told reporters in Peking yesterday that he would return to Cambodia "maybe in a couple of days, maybe in a couple of weeks."

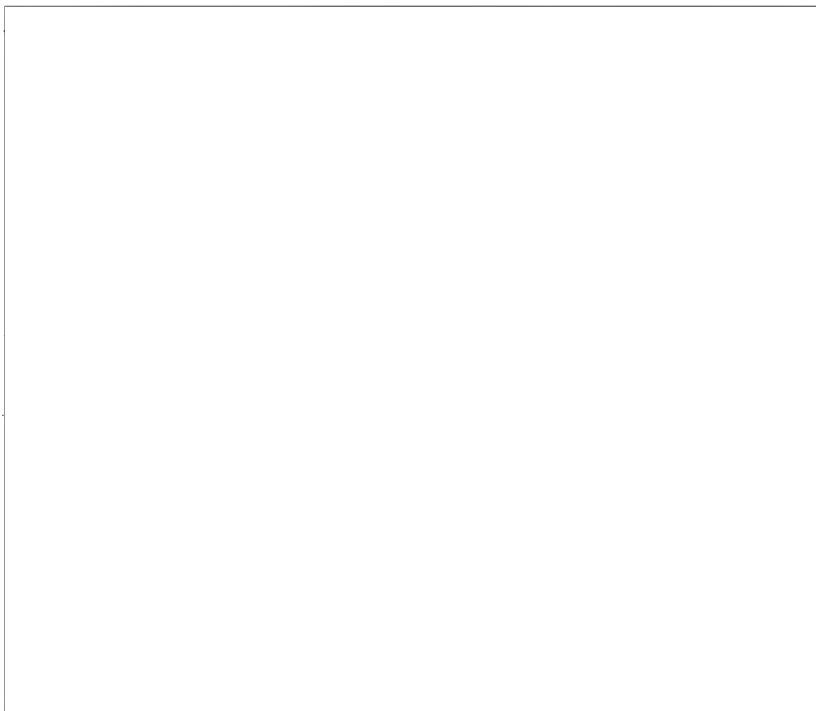
The situation outside Phnom Penh remains confused. The government garrisons at Kompong Speu and Kompong Cham have surrendered, but government commanders at Kompong Som, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Thom, and a number of towns in the northwest claim they will fight as long as possible.

We have received no word on the status of the isolated enclaves of Kampot, Takeo, and Svay Rieng, but they would appear to have little choice but to surrender. Communist units near Prey Veng yesterday were cautioned to be "gentle in every way possible" during the occupation of that town.

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SYRIA-ISRAEL



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PORTUGAL

Admiral Antonio Rosa Coutinho, rapidly emerging as a dominant member of the 28-man Revolutionary Council, promised on Tuesday that elections will be held, but that the Armed Forces Movement will not allow itself to be a "prisoner of the results."

In an hour-long televised interview, Coutinho tried to counter widespread suspicion that the Movement might cancel or delay the elections out of fear that the results would show that the people do not support the Movement's policies. Coutinho said that elections must be held. He added, however, that the elections will not affect the Movement's decision to move toward socialism and stay in power for at least the next three years.

Coutinho, a 49-year-old career navy officer who served until recently as head of the governing junta in Angola, has appeared more and more frequently as a Movement spokesman. This week he was appointed executive director of the Revolutionary Council, a powerful position that includes authority to spend up to \$400,000 without government approval.

[redacted] Coutinho will soon be named armed forces chief of staff, a position now held by President Costa Gomes [redacted]

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Socialist leader Mario Soares has [redacted] identified Coutinho as the leader of the leftist socialist faction within the Revolutionary Council. Soares believes that this is the most important group in the Council and that it is slightly larger than Prime Minister Goncalves' pro-communist faction. Coutinho is frequently mentioned as the leading contender to replace Prime Minister Goncalves should he falter.

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He is now in charge of the inquiry into the March 11 coup attempt. The preliminary results of the investigation are to be published next week. Some civilians may be implicated, and members of the moderate Socialist and Popular Democratic parties fear that disclosures just before elections will hurt them at the polls.

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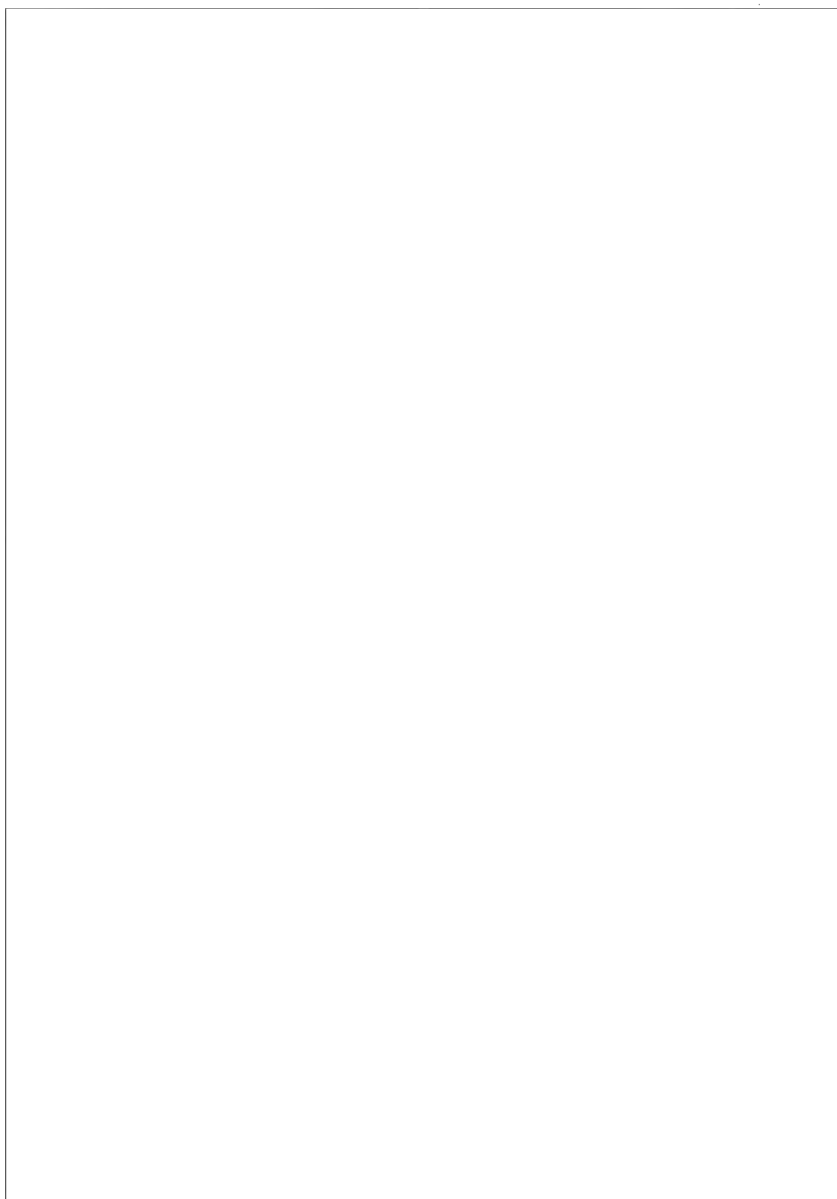
Coutinho created a stir last week by calling for the establishment of a new political party--described as a "civilian Armed Forces Movement"--to which the Movement could gradually transfer some of its powers. Coutinho openly admits his distaste for Soares, whom he sees as too conservative, but he even more strongly opposes the influence the communists now enjoy in the government. His proposed new party would fall ideologically somewhere between the Socialists and the communists and, in his view, eliminate bickering and fighting among the parties.

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USSR

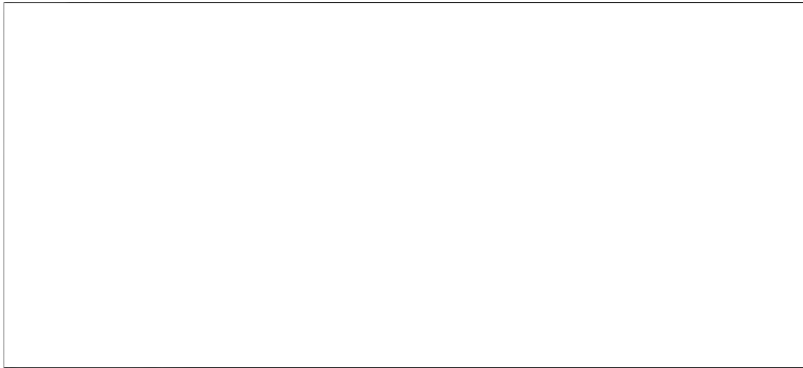


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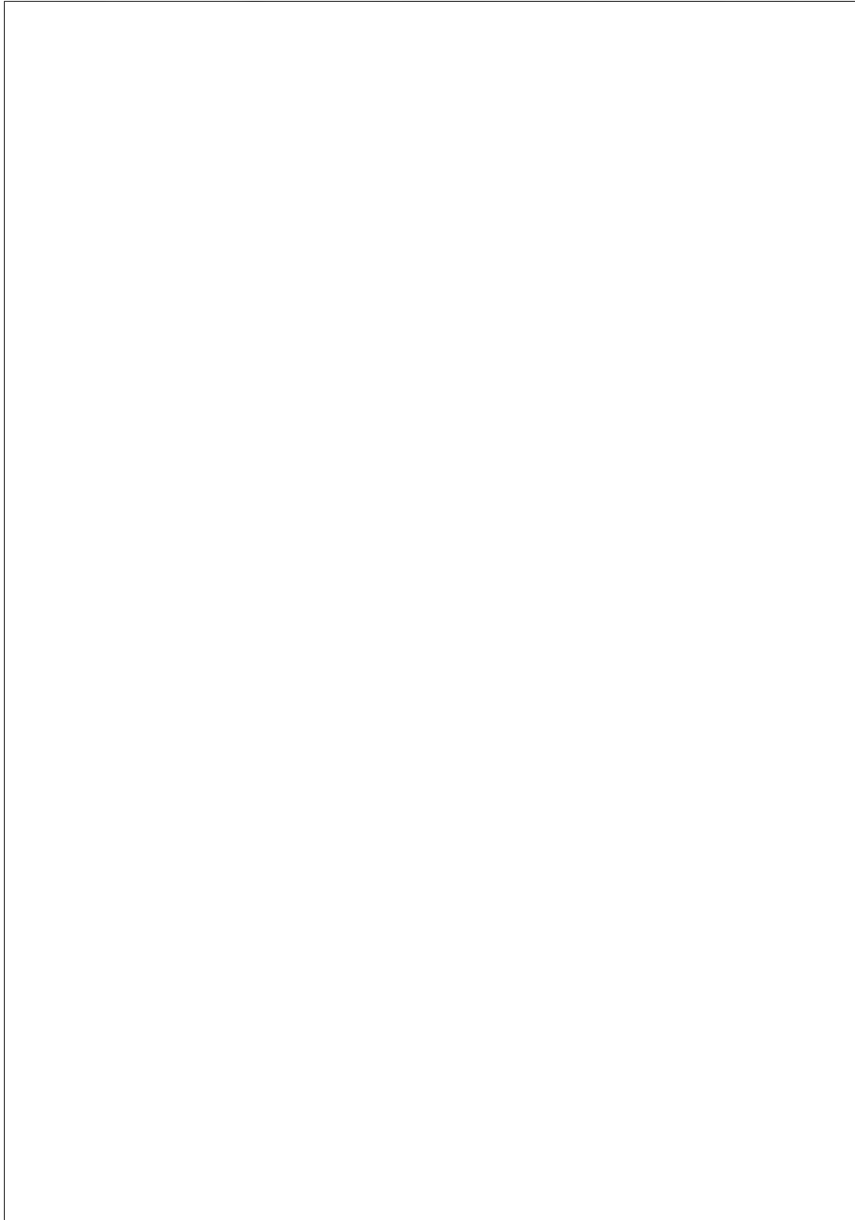
ZAMBIA



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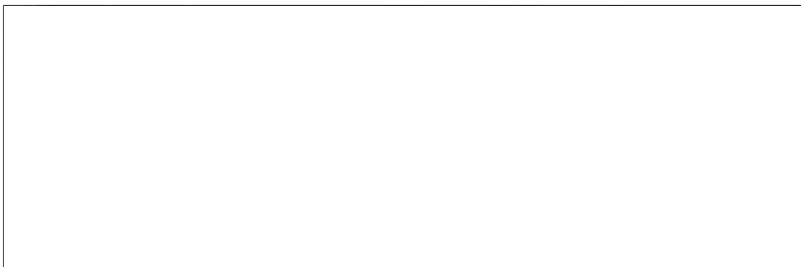
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LIBYA-EGYPT

The gradually building tension between Libya and Egypt flared up this week with both sides publicly threatening to sever diplomatic relations.

The Libyans, apparently infuriated by President Sadat's recent public characterization of President Qadhafi as "insane," issued a formal protest to the Egyptian ambassador on Wednesday, charging Sadat with "flagrant intervention in Libyan affairs." The message warned that Qadhafi and the Revolutionary Command Council were firmly united and that Sadat's "campaign" to drive a wedge between them could lead to a break in relations.



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The Libyan protest note drew a quick message from Cairo rejecting the Libyan note and holding the Libyan leadership directly responsible for the safety of the resident Egyptian community of 200,000 persons.

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US officials in Tripoli believe many Libyans are eager to go on an anti-Egyptian rampage that could quickly get out of control. Qadhafi, however, will move cautiously with regard to resident Egyptians, without whom Libyan schools, hospitals, and the economy itself could not function.

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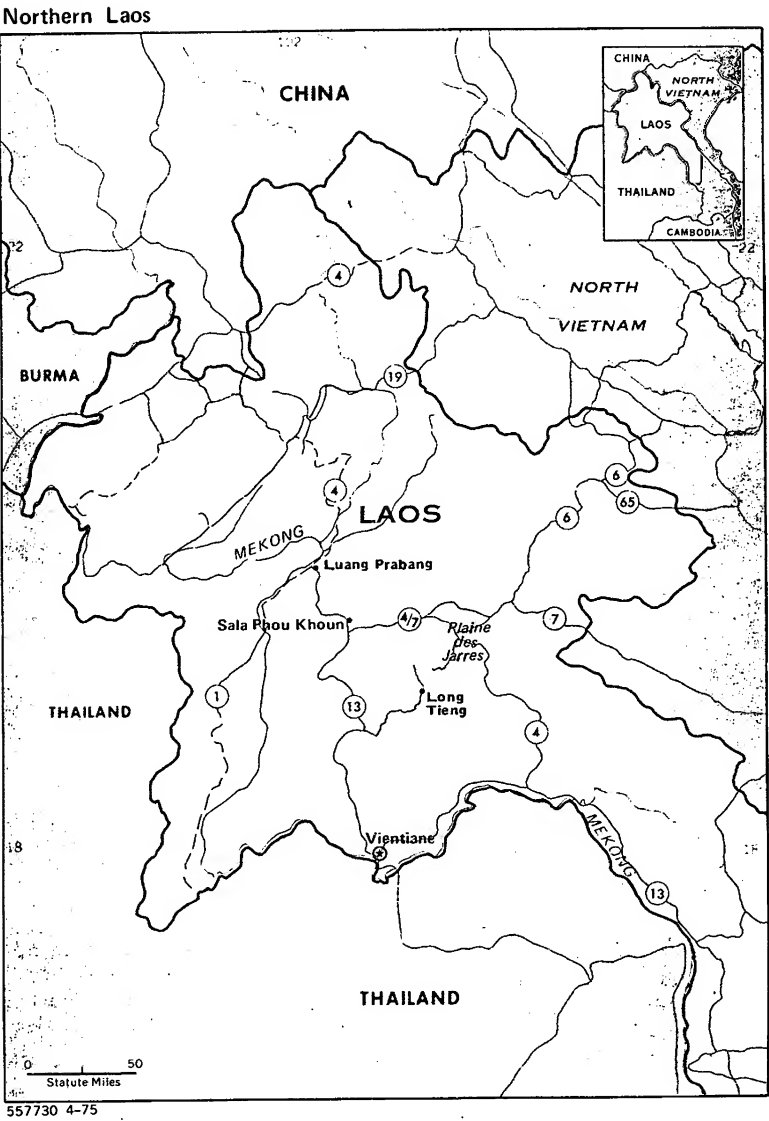
In such a highly charged atmosphere, it is problematical whether practical economic and political considerations will constrain the two sides.

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Resentment of Egypt is one of the few issues that can firmly unite the Libyan leadership and its people and fuel their most irrational tendencies. Having been rebuffed repeatedly in his attempts at reconciliation with Sadat, Qadhafi now probably feels only the barest need for restraint.

Sadat's recent outbursts against Qadhafi probably stem from a genuine fear that the Libyan is willing and able to conduct subversive operations in Egypt. In periods such as the present, when Sadat and his policies are under attack in the Arab world, he feels vulnerable to subversion by Libya and fearful that other Arabs will join forces with Libya in an attempt to upset his negotiating strategy.



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LAOS

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[redacted]
[redacted] Pathet Lao forces have become increasingly aggressive in the Sala Phou Khoun area of northern Laos. Sala Phou Khoun is a strategic crossroads town located at the junction of routes 4/7 and 13, approximately 100 miles north of Vientiane. It has been controlled by the non-communists since the February 1973 cease-fire in Laos.

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[redacted] Pathet Lao forces launched a series of attacks earlier this week, forcing the non-communists to abandon all their positions east of the town. Attacks, allegedly involving at least two tanks, artillery, and ground forces, were also reported against the non-communists' command headquarters at Sala Phou Khoun itself. Fighting in the area subsided yesterday, however, with the non-communists still in control of the junction and nearby positions along Route 13.

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[redacted] senior non-communist military leaders will almost certainly interpret the actions at Sala Phou Khoun as an indication that the Pathet Lao have been emboldened by communist battlefield successes in Cambodia and South Vietnam into adopting a more militant posture in Laos. There is no evidence at this point, however, that the incidents at Sala Phou Khoun represent anything more than the kind of localized skirmishing that has periodically punctuated the two-year-old cease-fire.

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Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, for his part, does not appear to be overly concerned with developments at Sala Phou Khoun.

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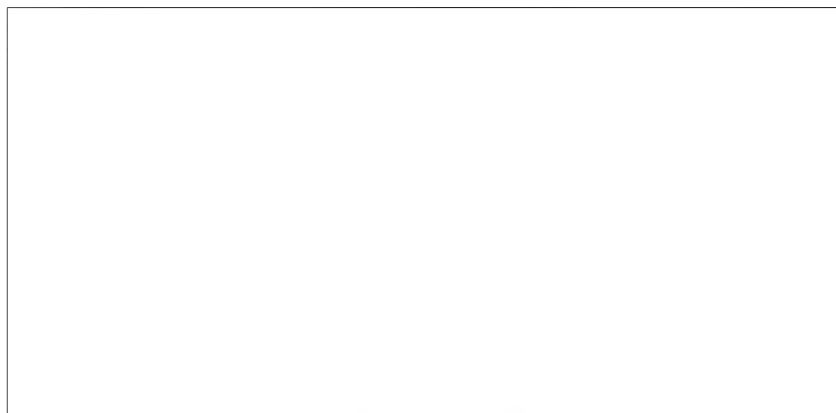
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NOTES

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Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash is facing his first serious challenge in the continuing debate over a constitution for the Turkish sector of Cyprus.

He is reportedly being challenged by four opposition groups who have been working together in the constituent assembly to curb the powers of the presidency which Denktash is expected to assume. He has also encountered resistance within his own cabinet. Denktash still enjoys Ankara's support, but he probably faces increased political opposition from the formerly cohesive Turkish Cypriot community now that the threat from the Greek Cypriots has so diminished. This could lead Denktash to assume a tougher stance in the intercommunal talks in an effort to restore his popularity. He could still be overruled, however, by Ankara.

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